

TRANSLATION ISSUES PUT ZARIF'S REMARKS SOMEWHERE BETWEEN ARAK AND A HARD PLACE (IRAQ)

On Wednesday night, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Zarif was interviewed by Iranian state television. Reports about what he said in the interview provided quite the adventure yesterday. Here is Reuters this morning trying to sort out just what took place:

On Thursday a story from the official Iranian News Agency (IRNA) cited by several news organizations including Reuters reported Foreign Minister Javad Zarif as saying that if Iran agreed to "do something in Iraq, the other side in the negotiations will need to do something in return".

"All the sanctions imposed on Iran over its nuclear activities should be lifted in return for its help in Iraq," it quoted him as saying.

But later on Thursday IRNA reported foreign ministry spokeswoman Marzieh Afkham as dismissing "reports by some news agencies about Iran and U.S. cooperation in Iraq".

"These reports are a misinterpretation of the foreign minister's remarks and are 'totally baseless'," IRNA reported her as saying.

So what did Zarif actually say? Here is PressTV's translation of the sentence in question:

"If we agree to do certain things at

[the nuclear facility in the Iranian city of] Arak, then they should agree to do certain things in return; one of those things would be for them to go to the [UN] Security Council and lift the sanctions," Zarif stated.

Wow. Arak is the site of the heavy water reactor that has been a point of contention in the nuclear negotiations from the start. If you watch the YouTube above, there is a translation of Zarif's remarks that does seem to suggest that the context for the remark does not fit at all with a mention of Iraq. A similar translation appears in the video at the PressTV site linked above.

Further clarification of that point comes from a Foreign Ministry spokesperson at FarsNews:

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Marziyeh Afkham categorically dismissed media reports about Tehran's call on the US to remove the sanctions if it wants the former's cooperation against ISIL in Iraq.

Afkham's remarks came as certain foreign media outlets misquoted Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif as saying that Iran is ready to cooperate with the US in Iraq in return for lifting UN sanctions against Iran.

"These reports are a misinterpretation of Foreign Minister's remarks and are totally baseless," Afkham said on Thursday.

The Iranian foreign minister had called on the US to remove its unilateral sanctions against Iran in order to pave the way for Iran's further cooperation with the West on nuclear issues, including Arak heavy water facility.

Several western news agencies, including AFP and Reuters, misquoted Zarif's

comments by substituting the word “Iraq” for “Arak”, which the foreign minister had actually used. The incorrect quote attributed to Zarif implied that Iran has conditioned its readiness to help tackle the Takfiri Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorists in Iraq on the removal of the sanctions imposed on Iran by the West.

The State Department seems to have figured out the error quickly. From yesterday’s press briefing:

QUESTION: On the general broader fight against ISIL, while President Obama, the British prime minister, and also the French president and foreign minister, they all spoke about this – that they need to get moving, the French foreign minister also suggested – well, the president suggested an international conference on the subject and that there should be a universal strategy. Apparently, the foreign minister has said that they would invite regional countries, including Iran, to that conference. Iran’s foreign minister today has said that Tehran –

MS. HARF: I think there was a little garble here. Do you want me to – about Foreign Minister Zarif’s comments?

QUESTION: Tehran is in touch with a number of countries. Number one, is the U.S. one of those countries discussing this? And they have conditioned their cooperation in fighting ISIL upon the relief of all nuclear sanctions.

MS. HARF: So let’s just talk about this for a little bit. There were – there was a story that Foreign Minister Zarif had linked its help with ISIS in Iraq to a lifting of Western sanctions. We have seen the story. We do not believe that

the report is accurate.

We understand that the Iranian foreign minister – and you’re never going to believe this – quoted in the story as referring to Iraq the country was actually referring to Arak, the Iranian nuclear facility. We’ve looked at the language a couple of times, actually, and think he was not linking in that specific quote fighting ISIS in Iraq to lifting of Western sanctions. He was talking about making progress on Arak, the nuclear facility, to lifting of Western sanctions.

Right, I know. It’s almost unbelievable.

QUESTION: But this was a Farsi report.

MS. HARF: Yeah, and our –

QUESTION: And they can’t – the spelling is totally different.

MS. HARF: I know, and our – but we think there was a mistranslation. Our Farsi speakers have taken a bunch of looks at it and think that he was referring to that. I’ll let him speak for himself, and if he wants to clarify and disagree with me – I am not a Farsi speaker – I’m sure he would have or his people would have further clarification. But on that particular AFP report, I just wanted to –

QUESTION: Actually, I cited a Farsi report on that.

MS. HARF: Yeah, but it came from a translation of the Farsi, and we think that was not accurate. I know it’s very –

QUESTION: Then what about his comment about – that Tehran is in touch with a number of countries on possible cooperation and participation in a conference?

MS. HARF: Again, I don't have more details on that article, but on that specific point I just wanted to be clear on that.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. HARF: I know. It's very odd, actually.

And, well, just because this seems to fit so well: